

Test Anxiety – Considerations for Educators/Students

Test anxiety... is that a real thing?

Yes, it's real. Test anxiety has real symptoms and real effects on student performance. 25% to 50% of students experience test anxiety.

Test anxiety looks like this:

- Heightened physical and emotional state
- Negative worry thoughts
- Reduced performance through impaired memory and focus

Test anxiety... but I'm an educator not a psychologist. Can I really help?

Yes, you can help your students. Test anxiety can impact how your students learn and perform on assessments. You can ensure better outcomes from your courses if you can:

- Help students recognize test anxiety
- Teach students to manage test anxiety
- Help students feel more familiarity with, and control over their testing experience

OK, so how can my students recognize test anxiety?

Students should be aware of two (2) things:

1. Their state of mind - Anxious thought patterns are very distracting:

- Lack of concentration, or "racing thoughts"
- Self critical/ comparison,
- Negative consequences of poor performance,
- Excessive focus on alternative answers

2. Their physical state – test anxiety may cause these physical symptoms:

- Rapid heartbeat and shallow breathing
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Stomach ache
- Dizziness
- Desire to urinate

What skills can I offer my students to manage their test anxiety?

Awareness + Perspective + Game Plan = Sense of Control and Confidence

Once your students can recognize their test anxiety when it occurs, they'll need strategies to defuse it. As an educator, you can offer these elements of successful strategies:

1. **Healthy perspective** on test anxiety: anxiety (aka worrying) is normal for most of us – worrying is an adaptation that helps animals survive. Luckily, there are effective tools to manage our nervous instincts.
2. **Relaxation breathing:** take several deep breaths, exhaling slowly after each one. Visualize the tension draining from your body as you breathe out.
3. **Release body tension:** tense your muscles and hold for 5 seconds, then relax. Repeat 3 times.
4. **Preparation:** There is no substitute for knowing the material that will be covered by a test.
5. **Be familiar with the test:** unfamiliar things make us nervous, so know the test format and if possible get familiar with the setting where the test will be given.
6. **Work in groups:** two heads are better than one... and don't stop at two! Group work and discussion is a great way to prevent feeling alone, hopeless, and overwhelmed.
7. **Organization:** keep study materials and resources organized. This can help students organize and recall knowledge in their minds.
8. **Practice:** Find out the format of your upcoming test and practice.
9. **Positive Visualization:** picture success; also visualize nervousness being removed from body when doing the breathing and muscle exercises.
10. **Positive self-talk,** some examples: "I got this! This is my expertise. Time for all that prep to pay off. One question at a time. I'm better prepared than ever to manage my stress. I have tools to defuse my nerves. It's not the end of the world if I don't do well. If I don't do well I'll get it next time."

What skills can I offer my students for Multiple Choice tests?

- Read each question carefully to avoid misinterpreting what is being asked, and read it more than once!
- Circle or underline significant words in the question.
- Cross out answers you know are wrong
- If the test is taken online, have scratch paper handy. Draw pictures, rephrase questions, write down the "knowns" and "unknowns". Create a visual for your brain.
- Improve your odds!! Use the Process of Elimination to rule out as many questions as you can.
- Skip the hard questions and go back to them later.

What skills can I offer my students for Essay Tests?

- Circle or underline significant words in the question.
- Make an outline to guide your essay.
- Skip the hard questions and go back to them later.
- Don't leave answers blank – partial credit is better than none.

What skills can I offer my students for Field Practicum Tests?

- Know what skills you'll need to demonstrate.
- Know your weaknesses.
- Become familiar with the test setting and any technical gear that a test center will be providing.
- Know the resources you can have on hand and become familiar with them: Field Guides, standards, etc.
- Manage time!! Create a Field Test timeline or time budget to help stay on track.
- Practice the field test with a friend or colleague serving as a "pretend" proctor. This is a chance to practice discussing what you're doing during the Field Test.

References

- Managing Test Anxiety: Ideas for Students, by Jim Wright
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- Reducing Test Anxiety – The PRAXIS Series
https://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/reducing_test_anxiety.pdf
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